

ACUTE NECK PAIN

WHAT IS IT?

Irritated or inflamed joints, discs, muscles or nerves.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Repeated movements or sustained positions such as:

- Poor sitting alignment while working at your desk or computer
- Working with your shoulders forward causing the head to tilt back
- Sleeping in an awkward position
- Sitting in a car longer than usual
- Looking up repeatedly as in hanging wallpaper or watching an air show

Arthritis or age related changes result in bony spurring and narrowing of the disc space. Joints with arthritis may become more easily inflamed by repeated movements or sustained positions.

Stressful work or home situations can increase the tension in the neck muscles which in turn causes greater compressive forces on the joints

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO GET BETTER?

If you reduce the stress on the neck, avoid movements or positions that irritate the joints, and allow the inflammation to settle down, you should expect recovery in a few days to a few weeks.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?

- **Avoid Painful Movements and Positions** – If it hurts, don't do it.
- **Ice** - the base of the neck; **10-15** minutes at least **4 times** each day
Continue icing 4 times daily for the 1st few days, then 2-3 times each day as long as symptoms last. A bag of frozen vegetables or a gel ice pack works well.
- **Medication** - Talk to your health care provider or consult the *Healthwise Handbook*. It may take 10-14 days for the medication to be fully effective.
- **Gentle Movements** – Gentle pain-free movements help to promote healing by relaxing the neck, improving the circulation and decreasing the inflammation.
- **Sleeping Position** – Use good support for your neck to allow you to sleep comfortably through the night. Adequate rest is very important to your recovery.

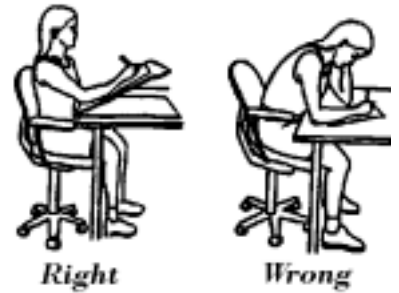
WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDER?

If you have followed the advice of this handout for **2-3 weeks** and your symptoms are not improving, are getting worse or spreading.

POSITION AND ACTIVITY GUIDELINES TO PROMOTE HEALING AND MINIMIZE SYMPTOMS

SITTING

- Avoid sitting slumped with the head forward or tilted to the side
- Support low back with folded towel
- Support arms on armrests of chairs or pillows to unload shoulders and neck
- Avoid sitting more than 20-30 minutes



DAILY ACTIVITIES

- During daily activities that require you to stand, place one foot on a step
- Avoid Lifting – this increases the tension in the neck muscles
- As time allows, for every hour you are up, lie down for 5 minutes to allow inflamed tissues to rest.

SLEEPING

- Lying on your side, use one pillow between your legs for comfort and another pillow to support your head and neck in the midline position.
- Press the pillow into the crook of your neck
- Do not sleep on your stomach



DECREASING THE STRESS

- Be in tune with your body and the feeling of tension in your neck and shoulders when you are under stress.
- Try to just let go of the tension.
- Try Relaxation Exercises: Abdominal breathing, visualization

GENTLE MOVEMENTS

- Do the following movements every 1-2 hours throughout the day:
Repeat each movement **5-20X slowly** and in a **pain-free** range.
- **Stop** if the movement increases your symptoms.

1. Abdominal Breathing:



Lie on your back with head supported in Neutral
Place one hand on lower stomach.
Breathe in through nose; attempt to make hand on stomach rise.
Breathe out slowly through mouth

2. Small pain-free movements:

- Move your head as if nodding Yes
- Move your head as if nodding No



3. Shoulder Blade Rolls/Squeezes:



Roll shoulder blades backwards
Gently pull shoulder blades back and down
(Toward your back pockets) Hold 3-5 seconds